Course: COLL 192
Term: Spring 2015
Room: Building TBD
Class: Wednesday, 7-8pm

COURSE TITLE: Reading *The Wire*: Television as Text, City as Character

INSTRUCTOR CONTACT INFORMATION

Instructor: Maddy Bullard
Email: mcb8@rice.edu

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course will focus on HBO's 60-episode television series *The Wire*, which aired from 2002 to 2008. The series explores the Baltimore drug trade and urban decay in unprecedented, incisive detail. Part of *The Wire's* originality stems from its unique use of the serialized television format: rather than completing one story arc per episode, common practice especially for traditional cop dramas, *The Wire* requires its viewers to remain engaged for a full season to see the "payoff" (arrests, elections, closure). The show's structure makes it filmic, not episodic—epic, not cursory.

During this class you will develop/extend close reading strategies to analyze the series, as well as use evidence-based arguments during class discussions. The course will be taught primarily from an English literature standpoint, although we will engage with many academic perspectives. Topics may include urban decay, crime, education reform, drug culture, gender roles, race, and modern television and entertainment.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

SKILLS-BASED

1. Develop close reading skills as they apply to *The Wire* and film in general.
2. Develop the ability to use evidence from the series and secondary readings to formulate coherent arguments.
3. Obtain a clear understanding of the structural and dramatic strategies that *The Wire* employs, and the effects they produce.

CONTENT-BASED

4. Identify the institutions that *The Wire* explores, and discuss how these institutions are dysfunctional.
5. Trace one or more character's development throughout the series, commenting on how they change and/or remain the same and presenting a cogent argument about that character.
6. Understand how *The Wire* borrows and deviates from traditional police procedural formats, and the effect of those similarities and differences.

ASSESSMENTS

Means of assessment will include participation in regular in-class discussions; short online blog posts to prepare for class; and a final project. For the final project, each student will be able to choose between a short (2 – 3 minute) presentation to the class, or a 2 – 3 page paper tracing a character through multiple seasons of *The Wire* and commenting on their character development and role in the series. I will have a predetermined list of characters from which we will choose. I am also open to alternative projects; if students would prefer to research a different topic, they will need to discuss it with me outside of class on Week 13.

Required Texts and Materials

I prefer that students watch all 60 episodes (5 seasons) of *The Wire* in advance of the course so that we can engage with the full body of work from the first class meeting. This will most easily facilitate class discussions, especially given that we will frame *The Wire* as a complete text, rather than an episodic one. I will endeavor to provide free access to all episodes of the show via OwlSpace, or to each student through other means, before winter break so that you can have time to watch before the beginning of spring semester. Additionally, I will periodically hold viewings of a few episodes at a time. These may serve as first viewings for some students, or review for others who may have seen the show in the past and want to re-watch. In order to be successful in the course, students will be required to have watched at least the first season in advance of our first class meeting, and to watch each season according to the course schedule.

Please note that *The Wire* contains material that may be offensive to some viewers. This includes, but is not limited to, unrestrained profanity, nudity, drug use, violence, and racially charged language. If you are uncomfortable with this type of content, please feel free to contact me individually.

Grade Policies

I request that everyone attend all class meetings and participate fully in discussion. In order to pass the course, you must complete the final project and maintain a passing grade for the blog posts and participation sections. I appreciate that this course will potentially take more time and effort than some other college courses; that fact will be taken into consideration.

40% = participation in class discussion
35% = blog posts
25% = final project

As with all student-taught courses, the grading will be on a satisfactory/unsatisfactory scale. I will return letter grades throughout the course to help you determine where you stand, but your final grade will not be a letter grade.

Grade Scale

A+ = 97 – 100%
A = 92 – 96
A - = 90 – 92
B+ = 87 – 100
B = 82 – 86
B - = 80 – 82
C+ = 77 – 100
C = 72 – 76
C - = 70 – 77
D = 60 – 70
F = < 70%

Absence Policies

If you need to miss class please let me know in advance. Students who miss more than one class will not pass the course.

Rice Honor Code

In this course, all students will be held to the standards of the Rice Honor Code, a code that you pledged to honor when you matriculated at this institution. If you are unfamiliar with the details of this code and how it is administered, you should consult the Honor System Handbook at http://honor.rice.edu/honor-system-handbook/. This handbook outlines the University's expectations for the integrity of your

academic work, the procedures for resolving alleged violations of those expectations, and the rights and responsibilities of students and faculty members throughout the process.

DISABILITY SUPPORT SERVICES

If you have a documented disability or other condition that may affect academic performance you should: 1) make sure this documentation is on file with Disability Support Services (Allen Center, Room 111 / adarice@rice.edu / x5841) to determine the accommodations you need; and 2) talk with me to discuss your accommodation needs.

SYLLABUS CHANGE POLICY

This syllabus is only a guide for the course and is subject to change with advanced notice.